

The President's Radio Address

February 26, 2000

Good morning. Last month, in my State of the Union Address, I called on Congress to help us launch a 21st century revolution in education, guided by our faith that every child can learn. This morning I'm announcing new steps to do just that—to provide tools for States and local communities to turn around their worst performing schools or shut them down.

If our Nation is going to make the most of the promise of the new economy, we must help every American make the most of their God-given potential. But students can't aim high in schools that perform low. Every child deserves a high-quality education.

Over the last 7 years we've followed a commonsense reform strategy: Invest more in our schools and demand more in return. I'm proud that our administration has enacted the largest investments in education in three decades, while, at the same time, working hard for higher standards, greater accountability, and extra help so that all children can meet those high standards.

It's working. Across our Nation, reading and math scores are on the rise. But in spite of this progress, too many schools in our poorest neighborhoods still fail to offer a quality education, and too few of these failing schools ever get enough help to turn around.

That's why I challenged Congress last year to pass my plan to establish a new school accountability fund to help States and local communities to fix failing schools. Together, we enacted a landmark initiative to provide \$134 million to States and school districts this year alone. Today I'm releasing official guidelines to ensure that these funds are invested in what works.

We're taking two unprecedented steps. First, under our plan districts and States will soon receive money dedicated entirely to turning around failing schools. This accountability fund will enable districts to take firm measures, putting in a tougher curriculum, helping teachers get the skills and training they need, and if necessary, closing down a failing school and reopening it under new management or as a public charter school.

Second, my plan also expands public school choice. For the first time ever, we'll require that districts give students in a chronically failing school the option to transfer to a better performing public school.

We know accountability works because that's what the experience of local communities tells us. Two years ago, for example, North Carolina drew up a list of the State's 15 worst performing schools and sent assistance teams to each school. Just a year later, reading and math scores shot up and 14 of those 15 schools improved their performance enough to be taken off the list. I've been to schools all over our country that are achieving in the very same way.

Ultimately, of course, it's up to States and local communities to take the reins and turn around a failing school, but the Federal Government must play a key role by granting more flexibility, demanding more accountability, and investing more in education. With today's action, we're declaring as a nation that we will not fail our children by tolerating failing schools. We must do more.

In our budget for the coming year, I'm doubling the size of the accountability fund to \$250 million and doubling our support for after-school and summer school programs, so that every child in a low performing school has the opportunity to participate. I ask Congress to do its part and make these vital investments.

Again, I also ask Congress to pass my "Education Accountability Act," which will make our schools even more focused on results. We must stay on track to hiring 100,000 high-quality teachers to reduce class size in the early grades. We must fulfill our commitment to build and modernize public schools. And we must invest in efforts to mentor disadvantaged students to help them understand that if they learn what they need to learn, they can all now go on to college.

This entire strategy is rooted in fundamental values: Everyone counts; everyone deserves a chance; everyone has a role to play; and we all do better when we help each other.

Fixing a failing school isn't easy, but communities are proving every day that it can be done. So we must continue to invest more

and demand more. We owe it to our children and to our future.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 3:37 p.m. on February 25 in the Oval Office at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on February 26. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on February 25 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast.

Remarks to the National Governors' Association Dinner

February 27, 2000

The President. Ladies and gentlemen, good evening. We will follow our custom tonight, which means that Governor Leavitt and I will give toasts, after which there will be no more duties, and we'll have a good time. [*Laughter*]

I want to welcome Governor and Mrs. Leavitt, Governor and Mrs. Glendening, and all of you to the White House, the 93d meeting of the National Governors' Association. I feel like I've been to most of them. [*Laughter*] Actually, we were thinking tonight, Secretary Governor Riley and Secretary Governor Babbitt, when we leave this year, will have attended 16 of these dinners. And I figure Governor Thompson and Governor Hunt are about that many. But I will have attended 20.

I told Governor Kempthorne tonight that he made a good swap when he left the Senate and became Governor. And I told him I never got tired of being Governor, and I always look forward to your coming here.

Two hundred years ago exactly this year, Thomas Jefferson became the first Governor to be elected President. One of the central principles he carried with him, from the writing of the Declaration of Independence to the statehouse to the White House, is that the role of Government can never be fixed in time or place; it must remain fluid while anchored to firm principles. Jefferson said, "Laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind. As new discoveries are made, new truths disclosed, institutions must advance also and keep pace with the times."

Well, today, 200 years later, in the tradition of Thomas Jefferson, our Nation's Governors are keeping pace with the times. This year your theme is "Strengthening American States in the Global Economy." It is truly a new economy. It has changed not only the way people make a living but the way we live and relate to each other and to people all around the world.

For 7 years now, you and I have worked as partners to give the American people the conditions and tools they need to make the most of this new world, with a Federal Government that is smaller, less oriented toward regulation, and more committed than ever to achieving high goals. With your help and hard work, America has made great strides in these last 7 years—cutting crime, cleaning the environment, improving education, moving millions from welfare to work, building the longest prosperity in our Nation's history.

For your role in all these achievements and for the work that you will do with us in this millennial year, I thank you. It has been a great joy and a great honor for me to serve as President and especially to work with the Governors.

I leave you with only this thought. In my lifetime, our country has never had the opportunity we now have to build the future of our dreams for our children. The longest expansion in American history before this one was in the decade of the 1960's. I graduated from high school in 1964. President Kennedy had been killed, the country was heartbroken, but we united behind a new President. We believed at the time that the economy, which was booming, would go on forever; that we would solve our civil rights challenges peacefully, through laws and courts; and that we would prevail in the cold war without particular incident.

Two years later, riots were starting in the streets. And 4 years later, 2 days before I graduated from college, Senator Kennedy was killed. That was 2 months after Martin Luther King had been killed and 9 weeks after President Johnson said he could no longer run for reelection, and our country was divided along partisan and cultural lines in ways that still manifest themselves.